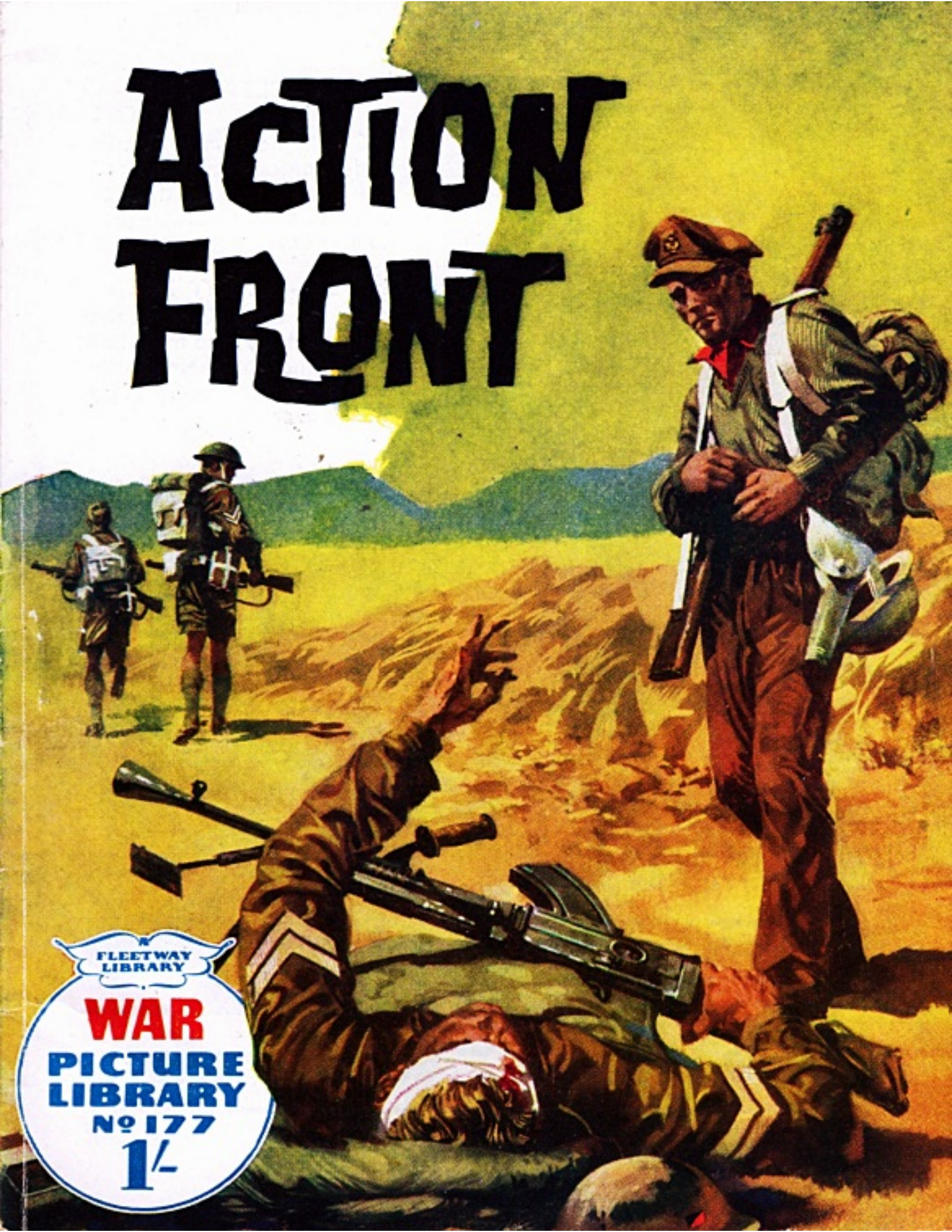


ACTION FRONT



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Clear FOR ACTION



**WAR
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No. 23.—CLEAR FOR ACTION

On the hell-run to Russia, under constant savage air and sea attack, was no time to learn to take an order—nor to give one.

No. 24.—FLIGHT DECK

To the carrier's crew, the flight deck was the front line and although their battle would never end, glory passed them by.



FLIGHT DECK



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ACTION FRONT



THE YEAR WAS 1942... THE
PLACE, THE WESTERN DESERT...
WHERE THE TIDES OF WAR EBBED
AND FLOWED WITH UNPREDICTABLE
RAPIDITY...

Chapter 1. *Enemy in Sight*



POINT-SECTION IN THE LEADING PLATOON OF A BATTALION PROBING FOR THE ENEMY. SUCH WAS THE UNENVIABLE ROLE OF CORPORAL DAN SHAW AND HIS SQUAD ...

DOUBLE OUT INTO OPEN ORDER. AND IF WE'RE SUDDENLY FIRED ON FROM THAT RIDGE AHEAD, I WANT TO SEE YOU DROP FLAT ON YOUR UGLY MUGS.



FIRE ON FROM THE RIDGE? THE WORDS DID NOTHING TO EASE THE MEN'S FEARS...

START CRAWLING, MADDOX. DON'T SKYLINE YOURSELF, OR SOONER OR LATER YOU'LL BE FOR IT -- SURE AS FATE!



WHO'D BE A PERISHING SCOUT? JOE MUGGINS -- THAT'S ME. THE FIRST TO COP IT IF WE RUN INTO ANY TROUBLE.



THE POINT-SECTION'S SCOUT WAS PRESSED CLOSE TO THE SAND WHEN HE REACHED THE CREST OF THE RIDGE ...



MADDOX CALLED UP DAN AND THE SECTION. THE CORPORAL TOOK ONE LOOK AND DETAILED A RIFLEMAN TO ACT AS RUNNER.

SLIDE BACK FROM THE SKYLINE, MURPHY, THEN GET YOUR SKATES ON AND REPORT TO MISTER HALLAM.



DUE WEST OF THE RIDGE, UNSUSPECTING MEN OF THE GERMAN AFRIKA KORPS WERE ENJOYING A "BREW-UP" ...

A BRIEF HALT TO GULP DOWN THIS ERSATZ COFFEE, HERR HAUPTMANN, THEN WE MOVE NORTH AGAIN.

ACH, SO, HERR MAJOR. IT IS THERE WE SHALL MAKE CONTACT WITH THE BRITISH.



NOT NORTHWARD, BUT DUE EAST, A BRITISH PLATOON WAS EVEN THEN TAKING UP A POSITION OF VANTAGE.

TEN PLATOON...
EIGHT HUNDRED...
ENEMY
DETACHMENT...

STONE THE CROWS!
LIEUTENANT HALLAM'S
GIVING A FIRE-ORDER!
AND AT THIS RANGE!
I'D SAY IT'S MORE LIKE
FIFTEEN HUNDRED
YARDS, ANYWAY.



HALLAM WAS AS "NEW TO IT ALL" AS THE MEN IN DAN'S SECTION. SO WAS THE PLATOON SERGEANT...

FIVE ROUNDS...
RAPID... **FIRE!**

IT'S A WASTE
OF AMMO, THAT'S
WHAT IT IS!



AS DAN SHAW HAD JUDGED, THE DISTANCE WAS NOT ONLY TOO GREAT FOR ACCURACY BUT HAD BEEN INCORRECTLY ESTIMATED. NOT A SHOT REACHED THE GERMANS.



GERMAN GUNNERS REACTED SWIFTLY TO A HARSH, GUTTURAL COMMAND. AT THE SAME TIME, ON THE RIDGE TO THE EAST, HALLAM ORDERED HIS PLATOON TO RAISE SIGHTS TO MAXIMUM RANGE ...



THE RATTLE OF SMALL-ARMS CARRIED BACK TO THE MAIN BODY OF THE STRUNG-OUT BRITISH BATTALION. ITS COMMANDING OFFICER CALLED A TEMPORARY HALT...

YOUNG HALLAM'S BUMPED THE ENEMY BY THE SOUND OF IT. I HOPE HE HAS THE SAVVY TO SEND BACK A MESSAGE GIVING US ADEQUATE INFORMATION...

IF YOU LIKE, COLONEL, I'LL PUSH ON AHEAD AND FIND OUT WHAT THE FORM IS.



THE BATTALION COMMANDER ACCEPTED THE OFFER MADE BY A TANK OFFICER ATTACHED TO THE UNIT.



LIEUTENANT GUY SAVILLE WAS CERTAINLY UNORTHODOX...JUST ABOUT AS UNORTHODOX AS A TANK OFFICER ACCLIMATISED TO DESERT WARFARE COULD POSSIBLY BE ...

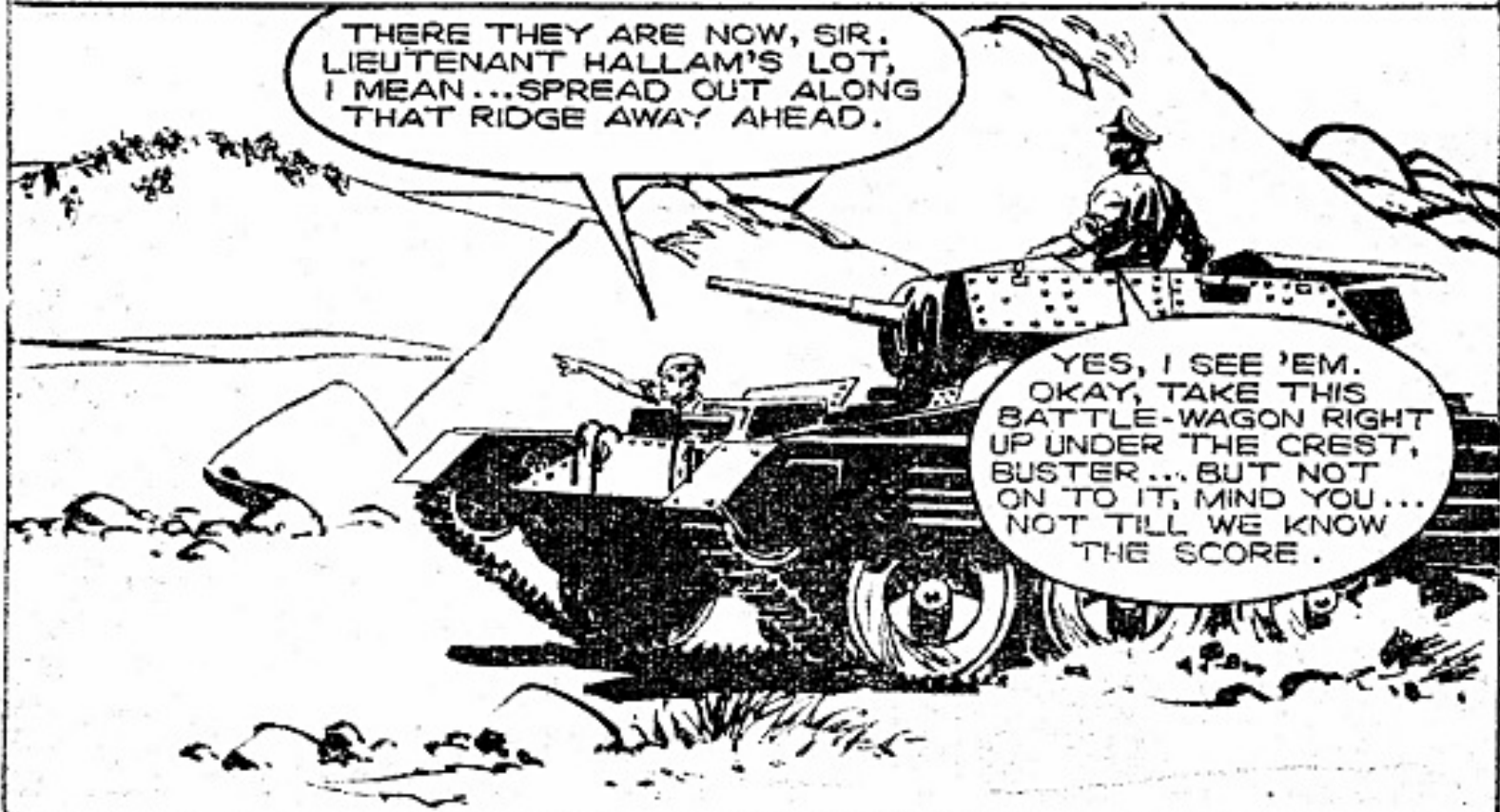
STEP ON IT,
BUSTER. YOU
CAN GO FASTER
THAN THIS.



HIS BRAND OF DISCIPLINE WAS FREE-AND-EASY. HE HAD NICKNAMES FOR HIS CREWMEN. IN DRESS, HIS ONE CONCESSION TO MILITARY DECORUM WAS A WORSE-FOR-WEAR CAP.

THERE THEY ARE NOW, SIR.
LIEUTENANT HALLAM'S LOT,
I MEAN...SPREAD OUT ALONG
THAT RIDGE AWAY AHEAD.

YES, I SEE 'EM.
OKAY, TAKE THIS
BATTLE-WAGON RIGHT
UP UNDER THE CREST,
BUSTER... BUT NOT
ON TO IT, MIND YOU...
NOT TILL WE KNOW
THE SCORE.



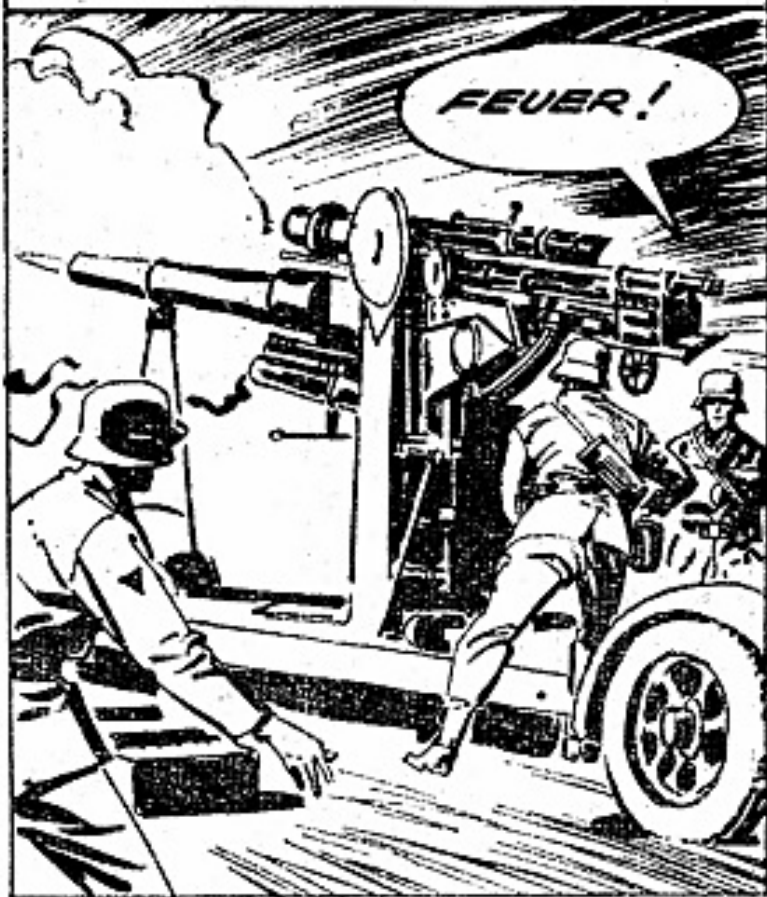
THE HEAVY ROAR OF THE IRONCLAD'S ENGINE CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF HALLAM AND HIS PLATOON ...

HERE'S THE CRUSADER.

THAT'S A COMFORT, SIR. SHE'LL BE ABLE TO TACKLE THE JERRY GUN. IT'S JUST ABOUT READY TO LET DRIVE AT US.



THE 88 m.m. HAD BEEN UNLIMBERED AND "LAID" IN THE AIM. SECONDS LATER, IT WAS IN BUSINESS!



ASCENDING THE RIDGE'S REVERSE SLOPE, GUY SAVILLE AND HIS THREE-MEN CREW SAW DIRT AND DEBRIS FOUNTAIN HIGH IN A GUSH OF FLAME ...



SHELL-FIRE!
I'LL LAY ODDS
IT'S FROM AN
EIGHTY-EIGHT.

YOU OUGHT TO
KNOW, DEAD-SHOT.
YOU'VE SEEN AND HEARD
ENOUGH EIGHTY-EIGHTS
IN YOUR TIME -- WITHOUT
EVER BEING ABLE TO
HIT ONE!

THE ECHOING BOOM OF THE EXPLOSION SEEMED TO ROLL DOWN FROM THE CREST TO THEM. DISTANTLY, AN INSTANT LATER, THEY HEARD A SHARP CRACK ...



THE CRUSADER CLANKED TO AN ABRUPT STANDSTILL. A SECOND SHELL SLAMMED INTO THE CREST, SHATTERINGLY... THEN A THIRD ...



LIEUTENANT HALLAM SAW HIS MEN DYING AROUND HIM -- AND GLARED AT THE TANK WHICH HAD GROUND TO A HALT IN THE REAR OF THE PLATOON...

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THAT TANK COMMANDER? WHY'S HE STOPPED? HE CAN SEE WE'RE TAKING A PASTING! HEY, SAVILLE, GET UP HERE!



THE CRUSADER DID NOT MOVE...

MISTER BLINKING SAVILLE AIN'T BUDGING. HE AND THE JOKERS WITH HIM AIN'T STICKING OUT *THEIR* NECKS.



HALLAM HEARD DAN SHAW'S SARDONIC COMMENT, AND HIS HACKLES ROSE IN WHAT HE RECKONED WAS RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION...

NOT BUDGING, EH, CORPORAL? WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT!



THE INFANTRY LIEUTENANT STRODE PURPOSEFULLY DOWN THE SLOPE. THERE WAS A GLINT IN HIS EYE ...

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE PLAYING AT? YOU CAN SEE WE'RE IN TROUBLE, CAN'T YOU? GET UP THERE AND SILENCE THAT JERRY GUN FOR US!

DON'T BE A CLOT!



WHAT DID YOU SAY?

YOU HEARD! IF YOU IMAGINE WE'RE TRUNDLING UP TO THE CREST ON YOUR SAY-SO, THEN YOU NEED YOUR HEAD EXAMINED...



A FURIOUS ARGUMENT DEVELOPED. HALLAM FAIRLY BLAZED. HOT-TEMPERED AND IMPETUOUS BY NATURE, HE SHOUTED ACCUSATIONS OF COWARDICE -- DERELICTION OF DUTY...

...YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE IN CHARGE OF AN ARMoured FIGHTING VEHICLE, AREN'T YOU? ALL RIGHT, LET'S SEE YOU AND YOUR CREW DO SOME FIGHTING IN IT!

AND LET'S SEE YOU SHOW SOME SENSE. PULL YOUR MEN BACK FROM THAT RIDGE. YOU'VE MADE 'AUNT SALLIES' OF *THEM*, BUT YOU'RE NOT DOING THE SAME WITH *US*!



SAVILLE ATTEMPTED TO CUT SHORT THE ALTERCATION BY CALLING TO HIS DRIVER...

WE'RE WASTING TIME! BUSTER, TURN THE BATTLE-WAGON RIGHT-ABOUT!

NO, BY GOLLY, YOU'RE NOT RUNNING OUT ON US!



THE TANK COMMANDER THRUST AT HALLAM IMPATIENTLY, IN AN EFFORT TO DISLODGE HIM. THE INFANTRY SUBALTERN LOST HIS TEMPER... AND SWUNG HIS REVOLVER...

CURSE YOU, SAVILLE! YOU'VE ASKED FOR IT!

A GALAXY OF STARS SEEMED TO EXPLODE IN FRONT OF SAVILLE'S EYES AS THE BUTT OF A THIRTY-EIGHT THUMPED INTO HIS TEMPLE. HE BUCKLED AT THE KNEES...

TAKE THIS THING UP TO THE CREST!
COME ON, COME ON!
DO AS I TELL YOU!

THE
BLOKE'S
GONE
BONKERS!

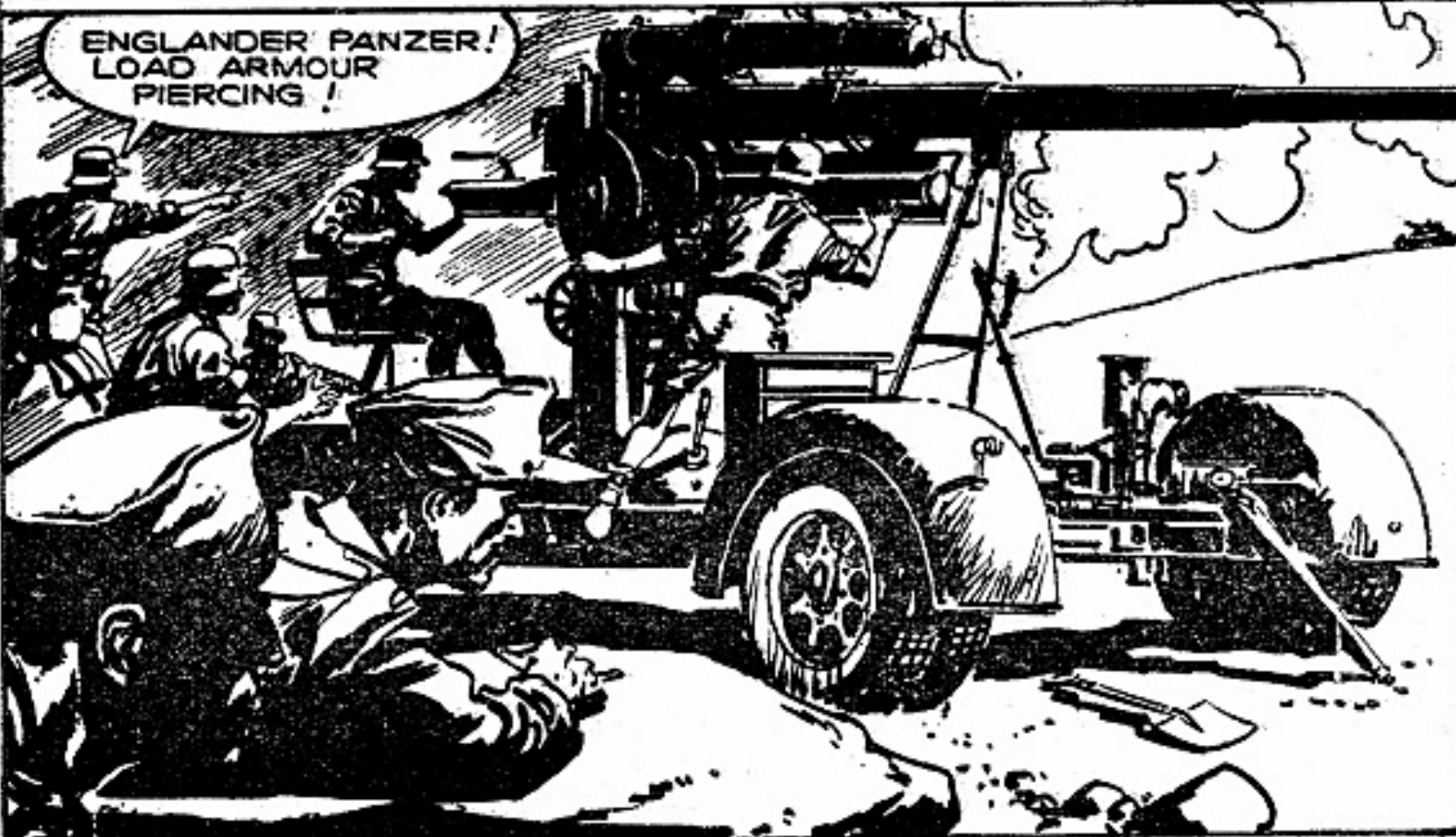
THE DRIVER HESITATED. THE IRATE INFANTRY OFFICER PROMPTLY SCREAMED ABUSE AND THREATS. GULPING, BUSTER ENGAGED THE GEAR-LEVER ...

IT'S UP TO YOU TO TAKE THE HEAT OFF THE INFANTRY! THAT'S THE JOB OF ALL SUPPORTING-ARMS, THOUGH YOUR CONFOUNDED LIEUTENANT DOESN'T SEEM TO KNOW IT!



THE CRUSADER ROLLED UP TO THE CREST. IT POKED ITS NOSE OVER THE RIM-- AND CREATED A STIR AMONG THE GERMAN 88'S GUN-NUMBERS ...

ENGLANDER PANZER!
LOAD ARMOUR
PIERCING!

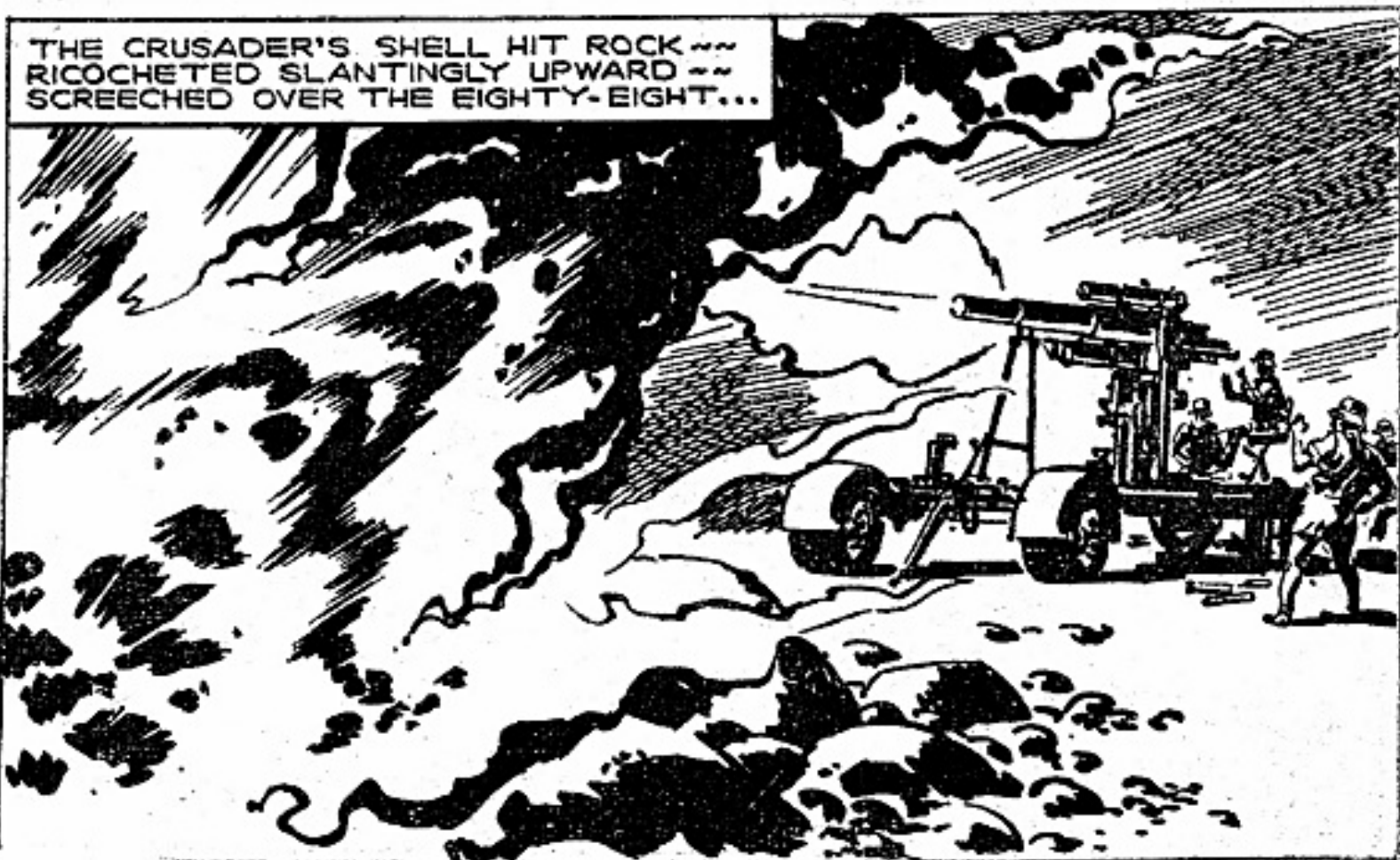


AN A.P. SHOT WAS WHIPPED INTO THE BREECH~~JUST AS A LITTLE 2-POUNDER SPAT OUT A CHALLENGE FROM THE RIDGE TO THE EAST...

LASHING OUT AT AN EIGHTY-EIGHT WITH THIS TOY CANNON IS LIKE A PUP YAPPING AT A FULL-GROWN MASTIFF!



THE CRUSADER'S SHELL HIT ROCK~~
RICOCHETED SLANTINGLY UPWARD~~
SCREECHED OVER THE EIGHTY-EIGHT...



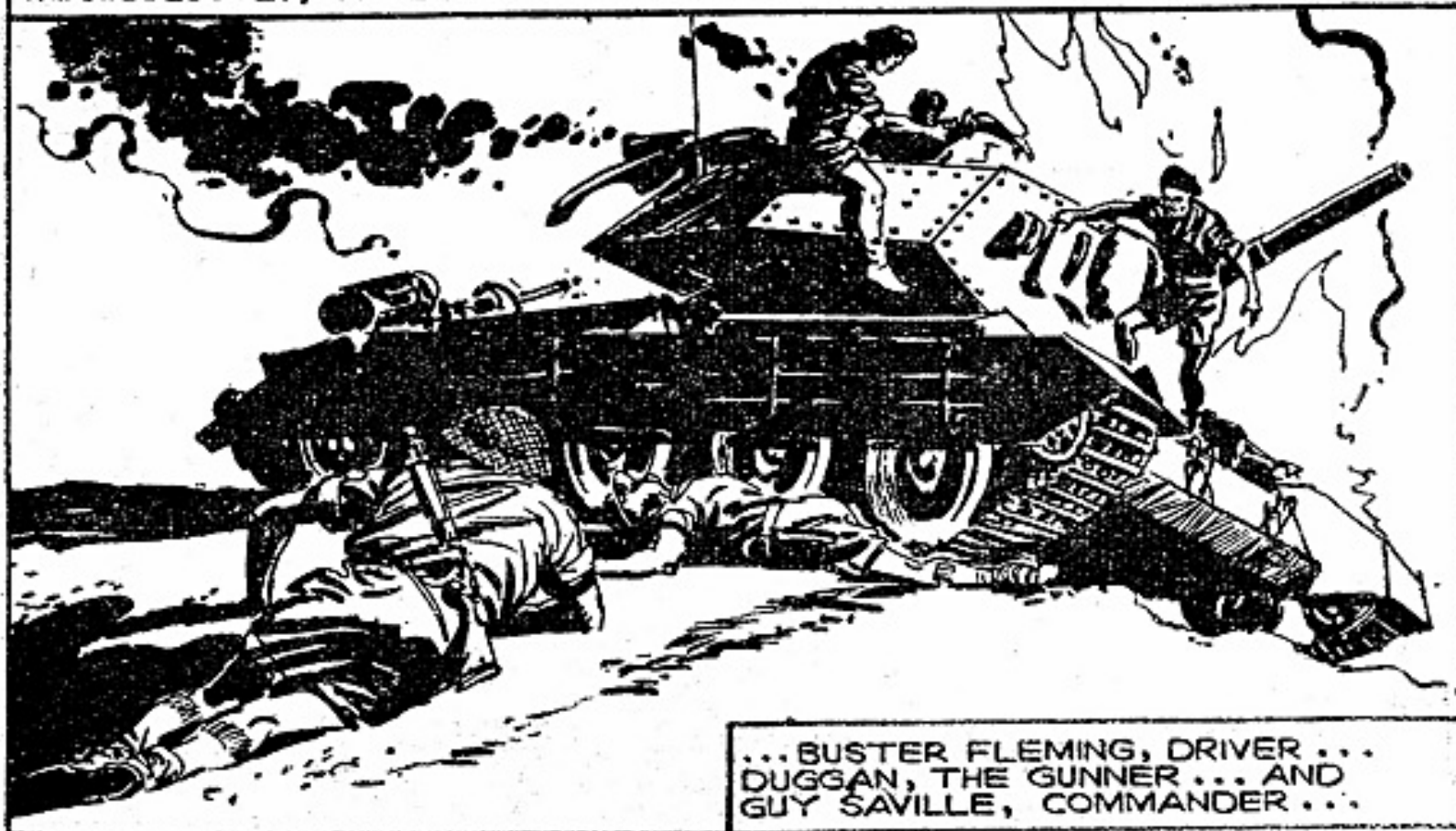
A NEAR MISS!
THAT COULD BE DUGGAN'S
FIRST AND LAST CRACK
AT THE JERRY GUN.



A SPLIT SECOND LATER, 19 TONS OF
IRONCLAD ROCKED TO THE
BLUDGEONING IMPACT OF THE NAZI
WEAPON'S POWER-PACKED REPLY!



JAGGED SPLINTERS OF STEEL LASHED AROUND THE TANK'S INTERIOR.
MIRACULOUSLY, THREE OF THE CREW ESCAPED WITHOUT A SCRATCH...



...BUSTER FLEMING, DRIVER...
DUGGAN, THE GUNNER... AND
GUY SAVILLE, COMMANDER...

Chapter 2. *Cut Off*

LIEUTENANT SAVILLE COLLECTED HIS WITS TO FIND DUGGAN AND BUSTER FLEMING BENDING OVER HIM ...

W-WHAT HAPPENED?



HIS TANK HAD BEEN DAMAGED -- HIS RADIO-OPERATOR KILLED. HE LEARNED, TOO, THAT HALLAM WAS DEAD. THEN CAME A SHOUT...

THE JERRIES ARE COMING AT US! THERE'S A HECK OF A LOT MORE OF 'EM THAN WE THOUGHT!



NAZI INFANTRYMEN WERE ADVANCING IN EXTENDED LINE. OTHERS WERE SWARMING FROM A WADI BEHIND THE 88 M.M. GUN WHICH WAS FIRING HIGH-EXPLOSIVE AGAIN ...

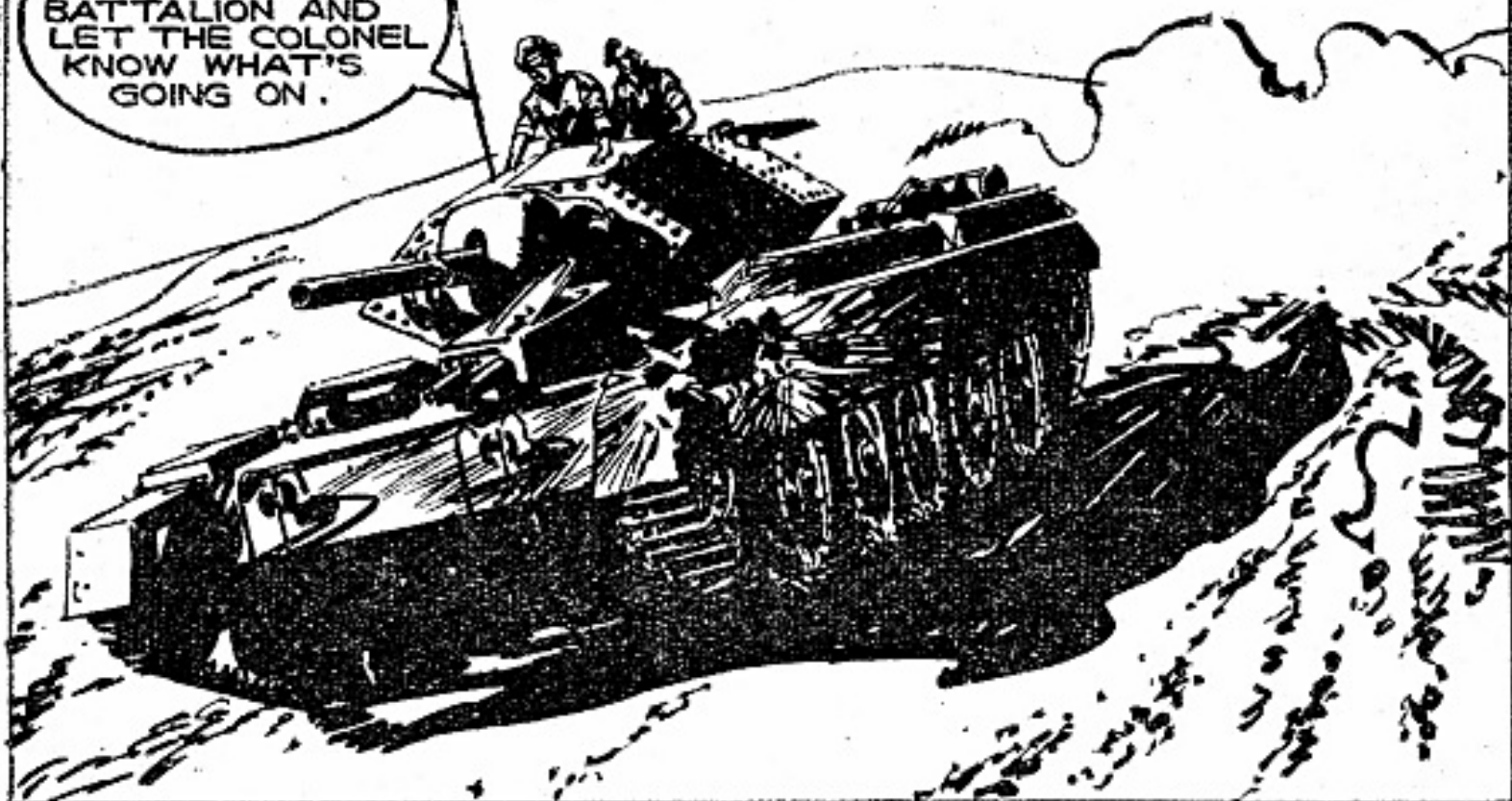


GUY SAVILLE SAT UP AND TOOK NOTICE ... AND MADE A SNAP DECISION ...



THE CRUSADER'S ENGINE STARTED RELUCTANTLY AND BUSTER TURNED HER DOWN THE REVERSE SLOPE, GRINDINGLY...

WE'LL MAKE A
BEELINE FOR THE
BATTALION AND
LET THE COLONEL
KNOW WHAT'S
GOING ON.

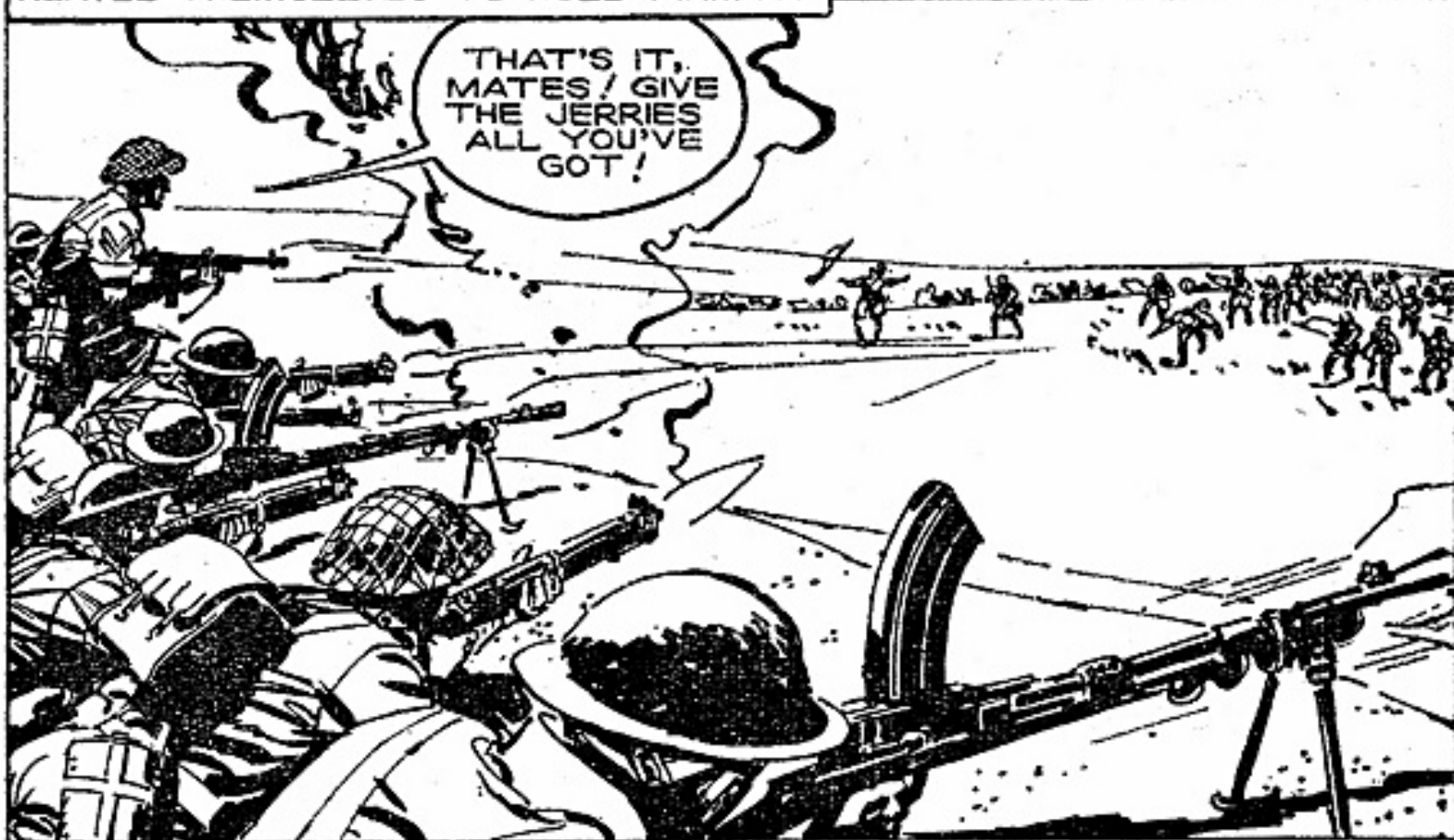


TO REPORT THE SITUATION -- THAT WAS GUY'S PURPOSE. BUT THE INFANTRYMEN ON THE RIDGE DREW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS ...

THERE GO OUR TRUE-BLUE
TANK PALS...LEAVING US IN
THE LURCH! TO BLAZES
WITH 'EM! WE'LL MANAGE
WITHOUT 'EM!



THE REMNANTS OF HALLAM'S PLATOON FACED THEIR FRONT GRIMLY. THOUGH MANY OF THEM WERE IN ACTION FOR THE FIRST TIME, THEY NERVED THEMSELVES TO HOLD FIRM ...



THE ONCOMING NAZIS WERE EASIER TARGETS NOW. BUT MORE AND MORE OF THEM WERE MUSTERING IN RESERVE, WHERE THAT 88 M.M. GUN WAS PUMPING OUT SHELLS ...



THE SURVIVORS OF DAN SHAW'S SECTION WERE DETAILED TO PULL OUT FIRST. THEY WERE WITHDRAWING DOWN THE RIDGE WHEN THEY SAW GUY SAVILLE'S CRUSADER BEGIN TO JERK CONVULSIVELY ...

LOOKS LIKE SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH THE TANK.

SHE'S SHED A TRACK! GOOD, THOSE WINDY JOKERS HAVE COME UNSTUCK -- AND NO MISTAKE!



THEY REACHED LEVEL GROUND. THERE, DAN ORDERED HIS SQUAD TO TAKE UP TEMPORARY POSITIONS ...



KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE SKYLINE. BE READY TO GIVE COVERING-FIRE TO THE SERGEANT AND THE REST OF THE LADS AS THEY BACK-TRACK DOWN THE SLOPE.

BUT AS THE SERGEANT AND THE REST OF THE PLATOON STARTED THE DESCENT, THEY WERE CAUGHT IN ENFILADE!

HECK!
WHERE
DID *THEY*
SPRING
FROM?

THEY MUST HAVE
NIPPED THROUGH THE
DEAD-GROUND OFF
TO THE NORTH,
JESMOND!

MAUSER RIFLES AND SCHEISSER MACHINE-PISTOLS WHIP-LASHED THE RETREATING BRITISH INFANTRYMEN WITH A TEMPEST OF METAL...

AAARGH!

DAN SHAW AND HIS MEN OPENED UP ON THE NAZIS WHO HAD OUTFLANKED THEIR COMRADES ...

LET 'EM
HAVE IT,
MATES!



THE GERMANS WHO HAD SKIRTED THE RIDGE WERE THEMSELVES RAKED BY AN ENFILADING FIRE ~ AND WERE STOPPED COLD!

TAKE
COVER!



DAN'S SECTION CONTINUED TO BLAST AT THAT GROUP OF NAZIS. EVEN SO, THE BULK OF THE BRITISH PLATOON WERE LEFT LYING ON THAT SANDY SLOPE.



THE CORPORAL MADE A SWIFT SURVEY OF THE SURROUNDING TERRAIN.

WE WON'T GET BACK TO BATTALION... NOT STRAIGHT BACK, ANYWAY! OUR BEST BET'S THE ROCKY STRIP TO THE SOUTH-EAST THERE. GO FLAT OUT FOR IT!



DUGGAN AND BUSTER FLEMING LOOKED TO LIEUTENANT GUY SAVILLE FOR A LEAD. THE TANK OFFICER NODDED, ACKNOWLEDGING THE SOUNDNESS OF THE INFANTRY N.C.O.'S REASONING ...



A HUNDRED YARDS LAY BETWEEN THEM AND THE NEAREST COVER -- THE LONGEST HUNDRED YARDS ANY OF THEM HAD EVER KNOWN ...



ONLY SEVEN OF THEM MANAGED TO
ESCAPE THE NAZI BULLETS.

GUY SAVILLE HAZARDED A GUESS
AT THE ENEMY'S INTENTIONS...

THE JERRIES
HAVE LET UP ON
US...THEY'RE GIVING
US THE GO-BY.

WHY ARE WE
STOPPING?

THEY'RE NOT BOTHERING ANY
MORE WITH SMALL FRY LIKE
US. THEY'VE SEEN FROM OUR
TRACKS THAT WE CAME
FROM DUE EAST AND THEY'VE
NATURALLY ASSUMED
THERE'S A BRITISH COLUMN
IN THAT QUARTER.

SOON, THEY HEARD THE RATTLE OF SMALL-ARMS' FIRE TO THE EAST...
AND SAW WAVE UPON WAVE OF NAZIS ADVANCING ...

HOW MANY MORE OF THE
PERISHERS? THAT PLATOON-
COMMANDER OF YOURS DIDN'T
KNOW WHAT HE WAS LETTING
EVERYBODY IN FOR!

HALLAM HAD BLUNDERED, SURE. THERE WAS NO DENYING IT. YET IT WAS GALLING TO HEAR A TANKMAN SAY SO...

ALL RIGHT, OUR PLATOON-COMMANDER SLIPPED UP! HE WAS NEW TO THE DESERT AND DIDN'T KNOW HOW IT CAN MISLEAD YOU WHEN YOU'RE NOT USED TO IT. HE WAS NEW TO ACTION, TOO...



HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE BUNGLED US INTO A FIRE-FIGHT WITHOUT SIZING UP THE OPPOSITION. ALL THE SAME, IF HE'D HAD THE BACKING OF A TANK-CREW WITH A SPARK OF GUTS BETWEEN 'EM...

WHAT'S THAT? WHY YOU...



GUY SAVILLE'S VOICE RAPPED IN SHARPLY...

THAT'S ENOUGH! NEVER MIND THE INQUEST ON WHAT WENT WRONG AND WHOSE FAULT IT WAS! THERE'S A BIG ENOUGH BATTLE BUILDING UP WITHOUT YOU TWO STARTING A PRIVATE WAR!



NAZI MORTARS OF HEAVY CALIBRE WERE NOW IN ACTION. SALVOES OF BOMBS WERE LOBBED FROM THEM TO BURST DEVASTATINGLY FOUR THOUSAND YARDS AWAY ...




SAVILLE LISTENED WITH INCREASING ANXIETY TO THE SOUNDS OF THE ENGAGEMENT ...




GRADUALLY THE TUMULT DWINDLED...AND THAT WAS A BAD SIGN...

OUR CHAPS MUST
BE RETREATING!
THE SHOOTING'S
GETTING FARTHER
AWAY...



AS THE AFRIKA KORPS MORTARMEN RODE OFF IN HALF-TRACKS TO
TAKE UP FRESH POSITIONS EASTWARD, DAN LOOKED AT SAVILLE ...

NOW WHAT?



WE START
WALKING, CORPORAL.
BUT NOT IN THE
DIRECTION THE
GERMANS HAVE
TAKEN. WE'LL
STRIKE SOUTH,
THEN SWING EAST
WHEN I CONSIDER
IT'S SAFE.

THE R.A.C. SUBALTERN
TURNED TO LEAD THE WAY.
DAN CHECKED HIM ...

HANG ON A MINUTE,
MISTER SAVILLE.
WE MIGHT BE IN FOR
A LONGER TREK THAN
WE BARGAIN FOR. WE
DON'T WANT TO BE
'CAUGHT-OUT', LIKE.



THE IRONY IN THE INFANTRY SECTION-
LEADER'S VOICE NEEDED GUY SAVILLE,
BUT BEFORE HE COULD SPEAK, DAN HAD
WHEELED ...

THIS WAY, YOU BLOKES.
WE'RE TAKING WHAT WE
CAN CARRY IN THE WAY
OF EXTRA AMMO AND
SPARE RATIONS.



THE TANK OFFICER FELT BOUND TO ADMIT THE SENSE OF THE
CORPORAL'S ORDER AS HE WATCHED THE FOUR INFANTRYMEN MOVE
OUT OF THE ROCKS.

WE'D BETTER
FOLLOW THEIR
EXAMPLE.



WHEN THE LITTLE PARTY LEFT THAT AREA OF DEATH AND DESOLATION EVERY MAN OF THEM WAS LOADED WITH ADDITIONAL GEAR AND SUPPLIES. SAVILLE WAS NO EXCEPTION.

WE'RE A SAD-LOOKING BUNCH -- AND NO MISTAKE. *WE* LOST 'SPARKS' FROM OUR CREW, AND WE'RE GOING TO MISS HIM BADLY -- BUT THOSE FELLOWS ARE ALL THAT'S LEFT OF A PLATOON MORE THAN THIRTY-STRONG.



THEY HAD GRAVITATED INTO TWO GROUPS, AS THOUGH BY SECOND NATURE. THEY STAYED LIKE THAT.

THE WAY THOSE COVES ARE ACTING, YOU'D THINK *WE* WERE TO BLAME FOR ALL THEIR MATES BEING WIPED OUT.



A MEASURABLE DISTANCE SEPARATED THEM, PHYSICALLY. BUT THE GULF WHICH KEPT THEM APART IN MOOD AND OUTLOOK WAS NOT TO BE GAUGED BY ANY YARDSTICK.

Chapter 3. *Spotter Plane*

IT WAS THE TAIL-END OF THE SEASON OF THE KHAM SIN, THE HOT WIND THAT SWEEPS THE DESERT DURING MARCH AND APRIL... AND SOON A DUST-STORM DEVELOPED...



I'VE A MAP HERE,
BUT IN THIS DUST
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO
SEE LANDMARKS OR
KEEP DIRECTION.
WE'D BETTER
HOLD UP.

NO NEED FOR
THAT. I'M MARCHING
DUE SOUTH ON A
COMPASS - BEARING. IF
YOU'RE LOST, STICK
CLOSE TO US.

GUY HAD NOT KNOWN SHAW POSSESSED A COMPASS. HE EASED OVER UNTIL HE WAS ALONGSIDE THE N.C.O.



YOU REALLY
THINK YOU'RE
HEADING SOUTH
NOW? I CAN
TELL YOU THAT
AT THIS PRESENT
MOMENT YOU'RE
NOT, CORPORAL.

ARE YOU
TRYING TO
SAY I DON'T
KNOW HOW TO
FOLLOW A
BEARING?

DAN'S TONE WAS BORDERING ON THE AGGRESSIVE. GUY SAVILLE "FLEW OFF THE HANDLE" AND SNAPPED AT HIM ...



THE LIEUTENANT POINTED TO THE BARREL OF THE NON-COM'S TOMMY-GUN ...



A SOMEWHAT CRESTFALLEN N.C.O. SURRENDERED THE INSTRUMENT AND SAW THE OFFICER PROVE HIS POINT...

TAKE A SQUINT
AT THE NEEDLE
NOW.

YOU WERE
RIGHT, SIR. IT'S
SHIFTED. ER....
MAYBE YOU'D
BEST HANG ON TO
THE COMPASS,
SIR.

THAT NIGHT, THEY RESTED IN A WADI. BY MORNING, THE KHAMSHIN HAD
BLOWN ITSELF OUT...

IF WE STRIKE NORTH-NORTH-
EAST WE SHOULD EVENTUALLY
PICK UP THE ROAD THAT RUNS
ACROSS THE SALT-MARSHES
CLEAR TO THE EGYPTIAN
BORDER.

THIS TANK LOOT AIN'T
MUCH OF A FIGHTING
MAN, BUT HE'S ON THE
BALL WHEN IT COMES
TO FINDING HIS WAY
IN THIS PERISHING
DESERT.



THEY RESUMED THEIR MARCH, QUITTING THE DRY RIVER-BED. TOWARDS NOON, THEY WERE TRUDGING OVER STONY LEVELS WHEN THEY HEARD A DISTANT THRUMMING ...

A PLANE!
IS IT ONE OF OURS?



SAVILLE HAD NO TALENT FOR AIRCRAFT-RECOGNITION, BUT THE INFANTRY N.C.O. HAD!

HECK, NO!
IT'S A JERRY,
SIR... AND FLYING
SO LOW THE
PILOT'S BOUND
TO SPOT US!



GUY BARKED AN ORDER... ONE THAT WAS PROMPTLY COUNTERMANDED!

**DROP FLAT--
EVERYBODY!**



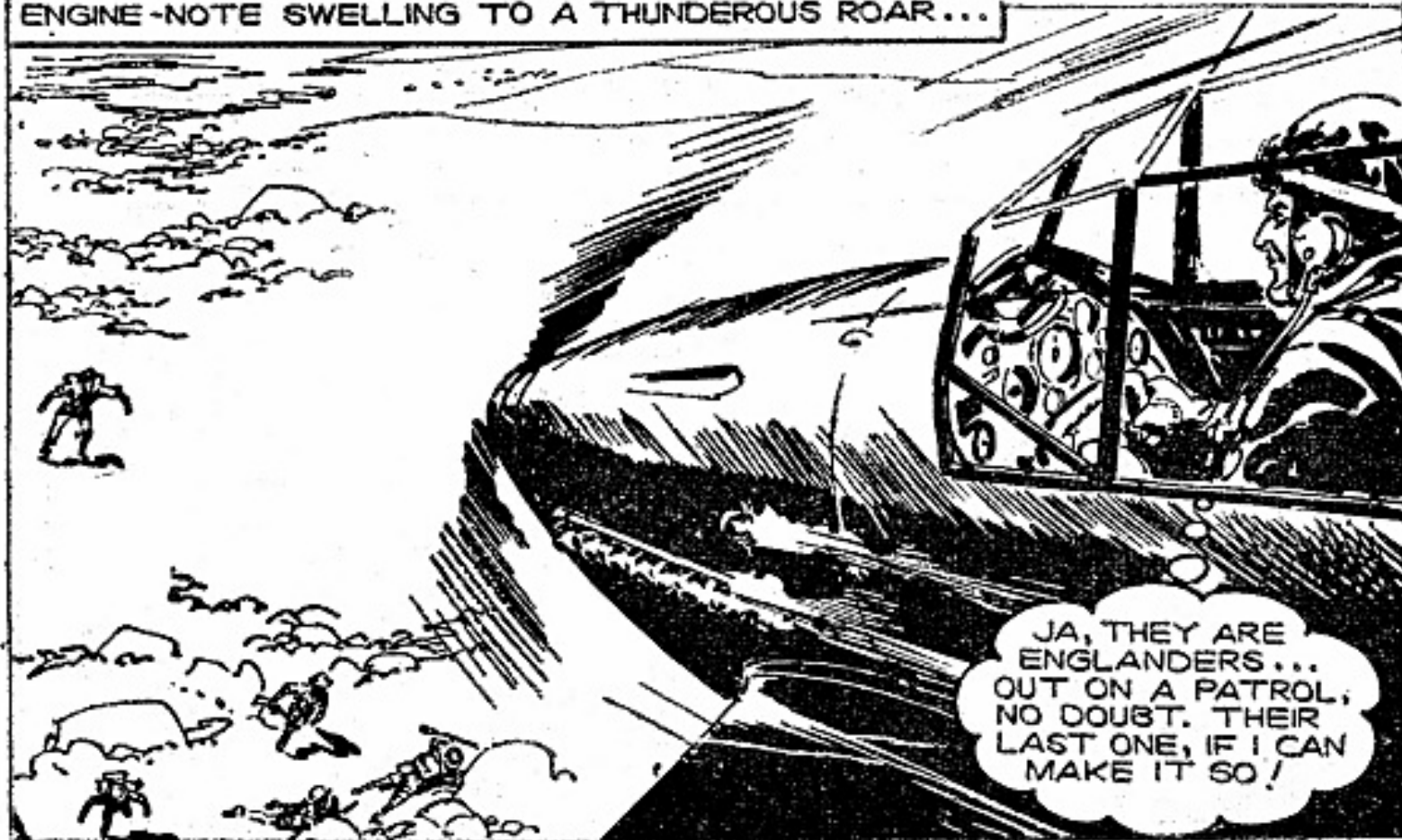
**NO! SPREAD
OUT AND MAKE
A DASH FOR
THAT FOLD IN
THE GROUND
FIRST!**

DAN'S VOICE COULD BLARE LIKE A BUGLE -- AND UNDER ITS IMPACT, NO-ONE PAID HEED TO GUY SAVILLE'S ... NOT EVEN DUGGAN AND BUSTER FLEMING ...



DON'T JUST STAY THERE, MISTER SAVILLE! HE'LL HAVE YOU IN HIS SIGHTS IN SECONDS!

THE ENEMY PLANE WAS EATING UP THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THEM, ITS ENGINE-NOTE SWELLING TO A THUNDEROUS ROAR...



JA, THEY ARE ENGLANDERS... OUT ON A PATROL, NO DOUBT. THEIR LAST ONE, IF I CAN MAKE IT SO!

IT WAS A MESSERSCHMITT 109. ALL AT ONCE THE SAVAGE CLATTER OF ITS GUNS PUNCTUATED THE CRESCENDO OF ITS POWERFUL MOTOR...



A BLIZZARD OF BULLETS CHEWED UP THE GROUND ALL ROUND GUY SAVILLE. HE TOOK OFF AS IF HE HAD BEEN CATAPULTED!




HE LANDED IN A HEAP, HIS HEART GOING LIKE A TRIP-HAMMER. SOMEHOW, THAT HAIL OF BULLETS HAD MISSED HIM.



A black and white comic panel showing a soldier in a trench, wearing a helmet and a backpack, firing a machine gun. A speech bubble above him says "RAPID FIRE!". In the background, other soldiers are visible, and there is a large explosion or splash of water to the right.

**RAPID
FIRE!**

THE ENEMY PLANE SLAMMED OVERHEAD THROUGH AN INEFFECTUAL SPATTER OF SHOTS. IT CIRCLED TO MAKE ANOTHER PASS...

A black and white comic panel showing a soldier in a trench, wearing a helmet and a backpack, looking up at a small enemy plane flying overhead. A speech bubble next to him says "TALK ABOUT BLIND LUCK! NOT A SCRATCH ON ME! HERE COMES THAT CONFOUNDED NAZI KITE AGAIN!".

TALK ABOUT
BLIND LUCK! NOT
A SCRATCH ON ME!
HERE COMES THAT
CONFOUNDED NAZI
KITE AGAIN!

THE 109 FLEW ANEW AT THE SCATTERED BRITONS. TRACER THRASHED INTO THE SAND -- FRIGHTENINGLY CLOSE TO TWO OF THEM ...



THEN SUDDENLY THE STRAFING ENDED. THE GERMAN SHEERED OFF. SEVEN FIGURES ROSE TO THEIR FEET AND MARVELLED THAT THEY WERE ALL INTACT ...

WHAT MADE HIM LET UP ON US? D'YOU SUPPOSE OUR SHOOTING WAS TOO GOOD FOR HIM?

I DOUBT IT. MAYBE HE DIDN'T HAVE TOO MUCH AMMO, AND WANTED TO KEEP SOME IN RESERVE IN CASE HE TANGLED WITH A SPIT OR A HURRI ON HIS WAY HOME.



THE MESSERSCHMITT DISAPPEARED. GUY SAVILLE AND DAN SHAW GLANCED AT EACH OTHER, BUT DID NOT SPEAK...

THIS YOUNG SQUIRT OF AN N.C.O. ACTS AS IF HE WAS IN COMMAND. STILL, HE SEEMS TO KNOW THE ROPES IN THIS BRAND OF WAR-- I DON'T!

HE MAY BE AN OFFICER, BUT HE DON'T SEEM TO HAVE A CLUE... OUTSIDE OF READING A MAP AND A COMPASS.



THE DESERT CASTAWAYS MOVED ON AND, AN HOUR LATER, SIGHTED THE ROAD. AN EXTENSIVE SALT-MARSH LAY BETWEEN THEM AND THE ROAD...

IMPOSSIBLE GROUND FOR TANKS, THIS --OR FOR TRANSPORT OF ANY DESCRIPTION. BUT IT'LL HOLD UP UNDER OUR WEIGHT ALL RIGHT...



DAN POINTED NORTH-WESTWARD. DUST WAS TRAILING FROM A DIP IN THE DESERT HIGHWAY...

A VEHICLE OF SOME SORT, BUT WE'VE NO MEANS OF TELLING YET WHETHER IT'S BRITISH OR GERMAN OR EY TIE.

WE'D BETTER PLAY IT SAFE AND LIE LOW.



THEY FLOPPED DOWN TO WATCH AND WAIT. A TRUCK FINALLY BOWLED INTO VIEW. IT WAS GERMAN AND BORE THE AFRIKA KORPS' INSIGNIA ...

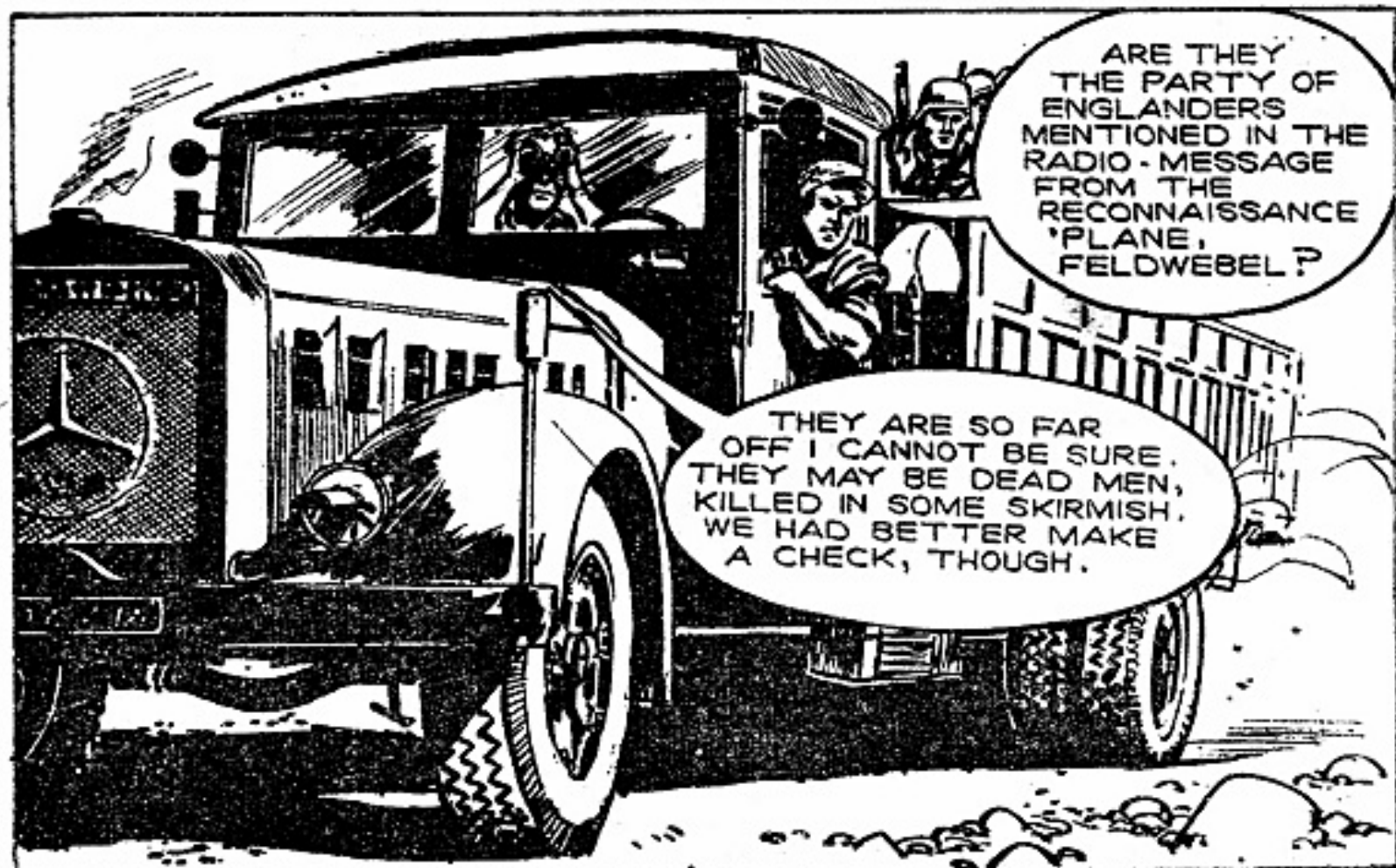
IT'S SLOWING DOWN. IT LOOKS AS IF THE DRIVER'S GOING TO PULL UP.

IT DOES AND ALL. PERHAPS THEY SPOTTED US.



ARE THEY THE PARTY OF ENGLANDERS MENTIONED IN THE RADIO-MESSAGE FROM THE RECONNAISSANCE 'PLANE, FELDWEBEL?

THEY ARE SO FAR OFF I CANNOT BE SURE. THEY MAY BE DEAD MEN, KILLED IN SOME SKIRMISH. WE HAD BETTER MAKE A CHECK, THOUGH.



THE GERMAN LORRY DISGORGED ITS OCCUPANTS--FIFTEEN-STRONG. THEY SHOOK OUT INTO OPEN ORDER AND STARTED ACROSS THE SALT-MARSH... WARILY... OMINOUSLY...



IN THE MINDS OF THE BRITONS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MARSH, THERE WAS NO DOUBT NOW AS TO THE NAZIS' INTENTIONS...

THEY MUST HAVE BEEN TIPPED OFF ABOUT US. WE'LL LET 'EM GET AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE BEFORE WE OPEN FIRE, CORPORAL SHAW. I'M NOT SO HOT WITH A RIFLE, AND NEITHER ARE MY TWO LADS.



THE GERMANS APPROACHED WITHIN TWO-HUNDRED YARDS. THEY WERE TENSED UP, UNEASY, ESPECIALLY ONE OF THEM, THE TRUCK-DRIVER ...

LET'S MAKE SURE NOW, FELDWEGEL!



HE SNAPPED OFF A SHOT. IT SQUIRTED SAND INTO JESMOND'S FACE...AND SPARKED OFF A RAGGED VOLLEY FROM LEE-ENFIELDS, BREN AND TOMMY-GUN ...

MADDOX, THERE'S ONE WITH A PAIR OF FIELD-GLASSES SLUNG FROM HIS NECK! **CUT HIM DOWN!**

HE KNOWS HIS JOB, THIS CORPORAL...



MADDOX SHIFTED HIS AIM AS HE SINGLED OUT THE MAN WITH THE BINOCULARS. THE LIGHT MACHINE-GUN STITCHED THE AIR WITH A BRIEF, STAMMERING BURST ...



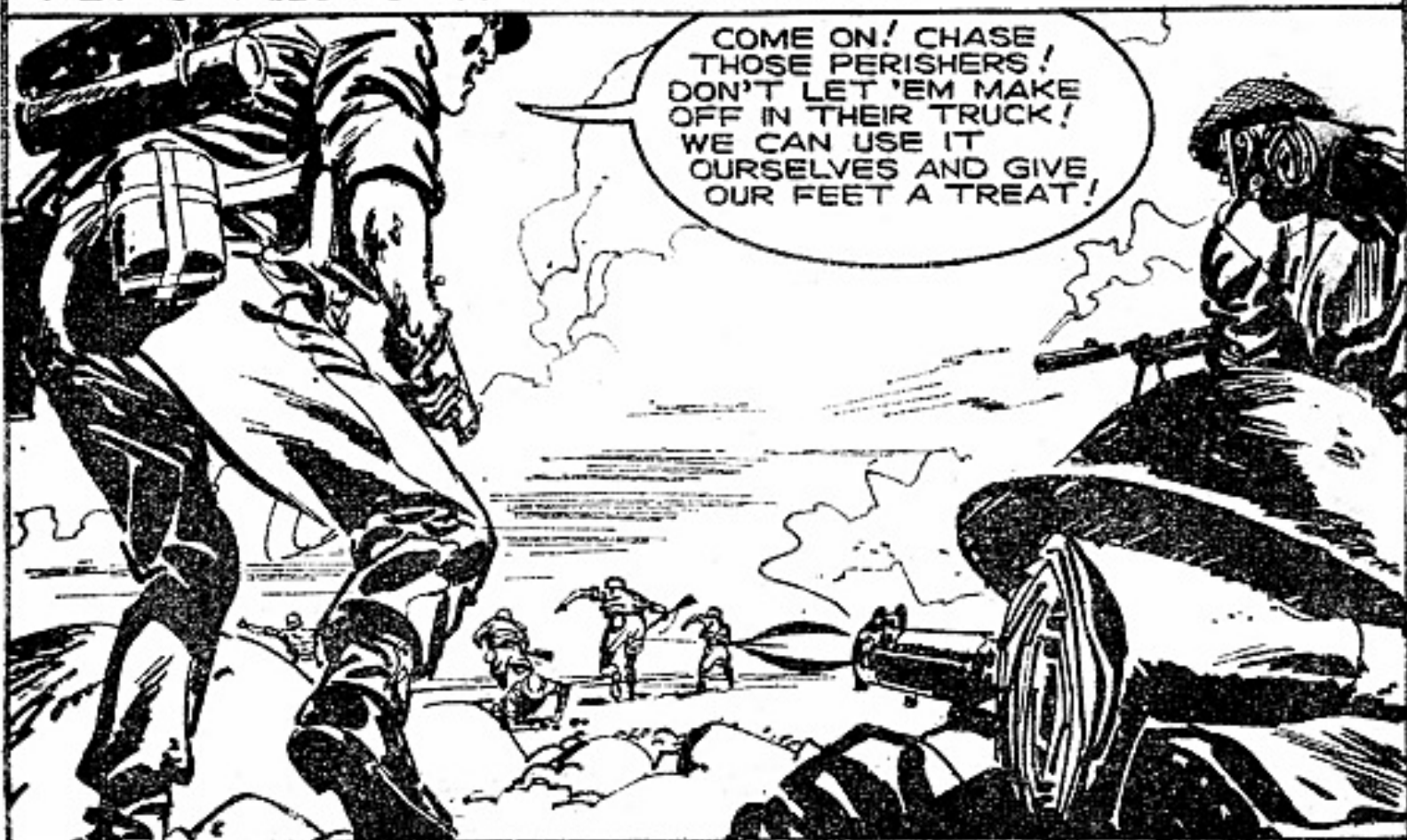
IF THE FELDWEBEL HAD LIVED, HE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE SENT HIS MEN TO GROUND AND UTILISED THEIR FIRE-POWER TO THE FULL. AS IT WAS, THEY SQUANDERED THEIR ADVANTAGE...

BEFORE THEY HAD COVERED ANOTHER HUNDRED YARDS THEY HAD BEEN WHITTLED DOWN DRASTICALLY ...

KEEP GOING,
COMRADES!
RUSH THE
ENGLANDERS!



NOW ONLY EQUAL IN NUMBERS TO THE OPPOSITION, THE NAZIS TURNED TAIL AND RACED ACROSS THE SALT-MARSH ...



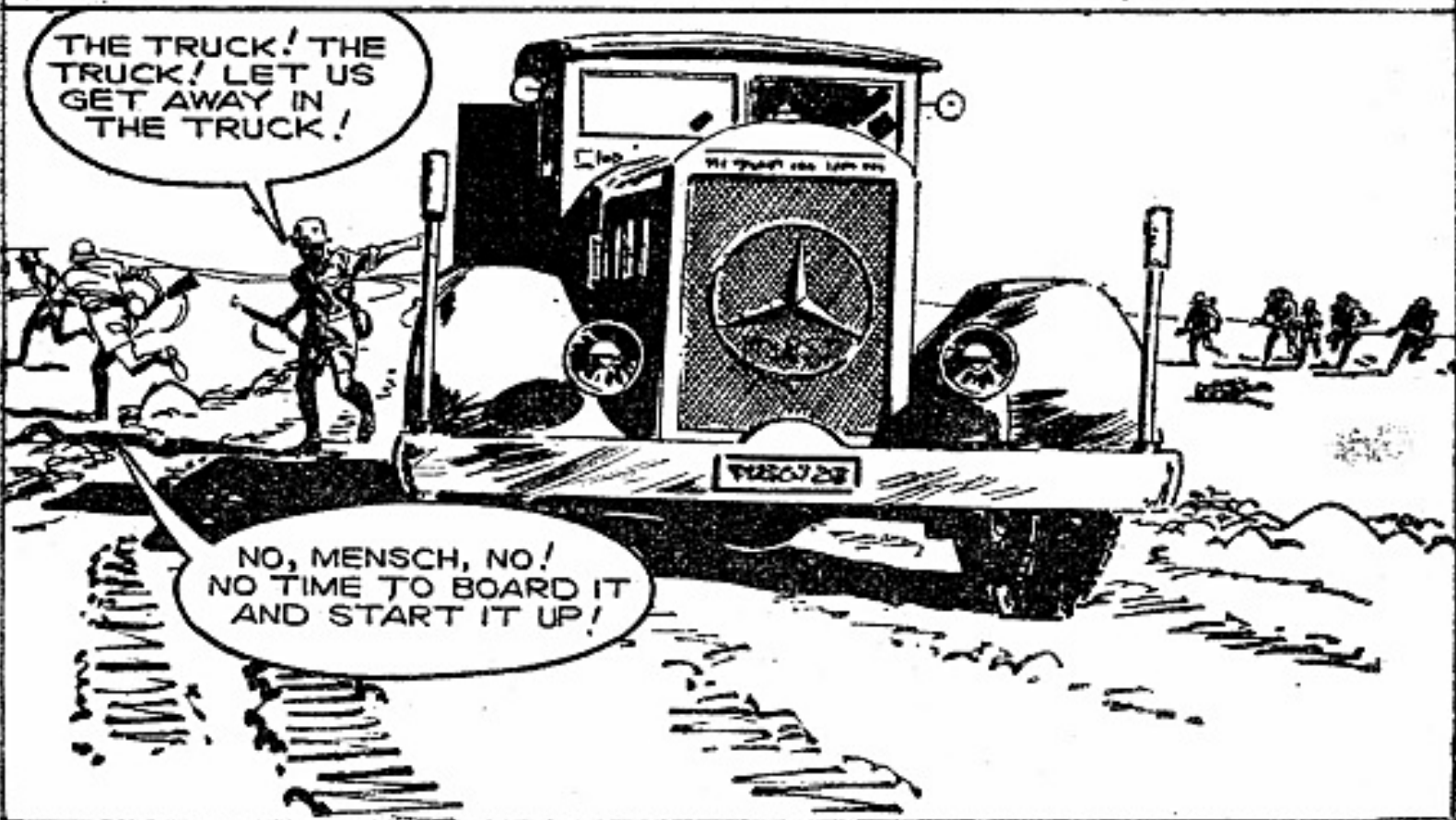
THE PURSUERS GAINED ON THE FLEEING GERMANS. BUT, A LITTLE WAY FROM THE LORRY, THE HINDMOST OF THE FUGITIVES SPUN ROUND IN DESPERATION ...



MADDOX BLASTED FROM THE HIP. HIS BULLETS THUDDERED HOME ... TOO LATE TO PREVENT THE ARCHING FLIGHT OF A STICK-GRENADE, THOUGH...



MADDOX FELL DEAD. JESMOND KEELED OVER. SAVILLE AND THE OTHERS KEPT GOING AS THE REMAINING GERMANS BELTED ON TO THE ROAD ...



SAVILLE CALLED A HALT WHEN THEY REACHED THE LORRY. HE WAS NO LONGER INTERESTED IN PURSUING THE NAZIS...

NEVER MIND 'EM.
WE'VE GOT WHAT
WE WANT, ANYHOW.
WE ----



HIS VOICE TAILED OFF. HE SWALLOWED AT SIGHT OF A HUMAN HAND THAT WAS CLAWING AT THE AIR...

WHAT THE
DEVIL?



Chapter 4. *Panzer Column*

RECOVERING HIMSELF AS MURPHY SPOKE, GUY SAVILLE UNFASTENED THE TAILBOARD AND TOOK A LOOK IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK...



HE CLIMBED INTO THE LORRY AND KNELT BESIDE THE MAN LYING THERE...



THE WOUNDED CAPTAIN DIED WITHIN A FEW MINUTES, BUT NOT BEFORE HE HAD GIVEN THE FULL DETAILS OF HIS TASK.



I'VE HEARD ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT IF THIS ROAD STAYS OPEN, A RIGHT-HOOK BY ROMMEL'S PANZERS COULD BE CATASTROPHIC. WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

THE DEAD OFFICER WAS LIFTED OUT. HIS SLEEPING-BAG WAS UTILISED FOR JESMOND. DAN RETRIEVED THE BREN FROM BESIDE MADDOX'S BODY AND HANDED DUGGAN HIS TOMMY-GUN ...



HERE, DUGGAN, YOU TAKE THIS. IF WE LAND IN ANY MORE TROUBLE, YOU MIGHT FIND YOU'LL DO BETTER WITH IT THAN WITH A RIFLE. I'LL GIVE YOU AMMO FOR IT.

DAN, MURPHY AND DUGGAN CLIMBED IN BESIDE JESMOND. GUY SAVILLE AND BUSTER FLEMING SHARED THE CAB ...



THEY MET NO ARMOURD-COLUMN. THE ONLY TANK THEY SAW WAS BRITISH AND DERELICT. WHERE IT STOOD, THERE WERE SALT-MARSHES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ROAD ...



THE MINES INTENDED FOR THE BLOCKING OF THE ROUTE HAD BEEN GATHERED BY THE GERMANS AND DUMPED IN THEIR TRUCK. GUY DIRECTED THAT THEY SHOULD BE UNLOADED...

WE'LL PLANT THEM
SO AS TO WRECK
A STRETCH OF THE
ROAD. WE'VE GOT TO
BLOW A BREACH IN THIS
CAUSEWAY ACROSS THE
MARSHES, CUTTING
IT COMPLETELY.

MISTER SAVILLE --
I --- I WISH I COULD
DO SOMETHING
TO HELP.



THE SUBALTERN LOOKED AT JESMOND THOUGHTFULLY...

YOU KNOW, THERE *IS*
SOMETHING YOU CAN DO.
THOSE JERRIES WHO
SKEDADDLED MIGHT DRIFT
THIS WAY AND PLUCK UP
THE NERVE TO ATTACK US
FROM THE REAR WHILE
WE'RE BUSY LAYING THE
MINES. YOU COULD
COVER US.



UNDER GUY'S DIRECTION, DAN AND MURPHY INTERRUPTED THEIR LABOURS TO LIFT JESMOND FROM THE TRUCK.

I'LL LUG THIS BUNDOCK ALONG WITH ME.

THE WOUNDED INFANTRYMAN WAS SET DOWN IN A POSITION WITH A BROAD VIEW OF THE EAST...

IF YOU ROLL ON TO YOUR CHEST, MATE, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO SPOT THOSE JERRIES A LONG WAY OFF ~ IF THEY COME THAT WAY.



GUY JOINED THE TRIO. HE GAVE JESMOND THE BREN INSTEAD OF THE RIFLE...

I DECIDED YOU OUGHT TO HAVE THIS L.M.G., LAD.

AS DAN AND MURPHY MADE THEIR WAY BACK TOWARDS THE TRUCK, THE LIEUTENANT LINGERED WITH JESMOND.

YOU SURE YOU'RE OKAY?

DON'T WORRY ABOUT *ME*, SIR. I'LL BE ALL RIGHT.



MEANWHILE, BUSTER, DUGGAN, MURPHY AND DAN SHAW WERE INSPECTING THE DERELICT TANK...



BUT AT THAT MOMENT, GUY SAVILLE
HEARD A DISTANT GROWLING NOISE ...



THERE WAS CLEARLY NO TIME TO LAY THE MINES. IT SEEMED ALL THAT
COULD BE DONE WAS TO DECAMP...UNLESS...GUY HAD AN IDEA ...



HE CLIMBED INTO THE TANK, FOLLOWED BY BUSTER FLEMING AND DUGGAN. DAN AND MURPHY HOVERED ALONGSIDE, UNCERTAINLY...

BUZZ OFF, YOU TWO! THAT'S AN ORDER!



BUNG AN A.P. SHELL IN THE BREACH, BUSTER... DUGGAN, BE READY TO FIRE ON YOUR OWN INITIATIVE! MEANTIME, I'LL GET BUSY WITH THIS RADIO...



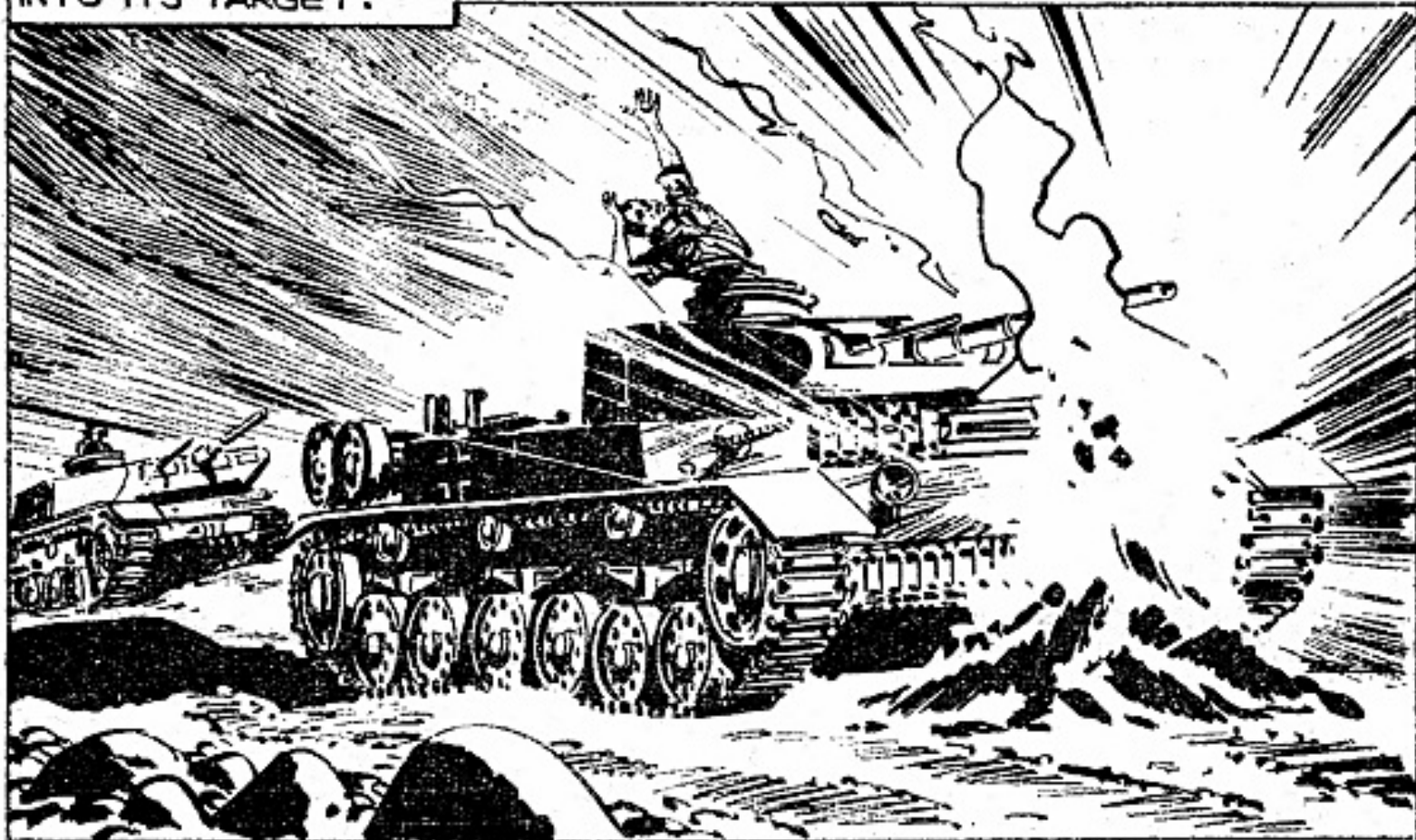
THE LIEUTENANT WAS LUCKY. ALMOST AT ONCE HE MADE CONTACT WITH AN AUSTRALIAN DIVISION'S HEADQUARTERS. HE WAS REPORTING TO A BRASS-HAT WHEN DUGGAN YAPPED A WARNING!

THE FIRST PANZER'S JUST CROSSED THE SKYLINE, SIR!

WHAT THE BLAZES D'YOU EXPECT ME TO DO ABOUT IT? BLOW KISSES AT IT? I TOLD YOU... FIRE ON YOUR OWN INITIATIVE!



THE DERELICT'S CANNON RIPPED OUT FLAME AND STEEL IN AN EAR-SPLITTING CHALLENGE. A 6-POUND, HIGH VELOCITY SHELL BLUDGEONED INTO ITS TARGET.



IT WAS NO FLUKE, EITHER. A SECOND SHOT WHAMMED INTO TOUGH, ARMOUR-PLATING TO NOTCH UP ANOTHER VICTIM...

TWO OUT
OF TWO! YOU
CAN CALL ME
'DEAD-SHOT'
NOW, MISTER
SAVILLE, AND
NO KIDDING!

GREAT STUFF,
LAD! YOU'VE
BLOCKED THE
ROAD--FOR THE
TIME BEING AT
ANY RATE. I'LL
TELL YOU
SOMETHING
ELSE THAT'S
GOING TO GIVE
THE JERRIES
A HEADACHE.



GUY REPEATED A MESSAGE THAT HAD JUST BEEN TRANSMITTED TO HIM FROM THE AUSSIE H.Q.

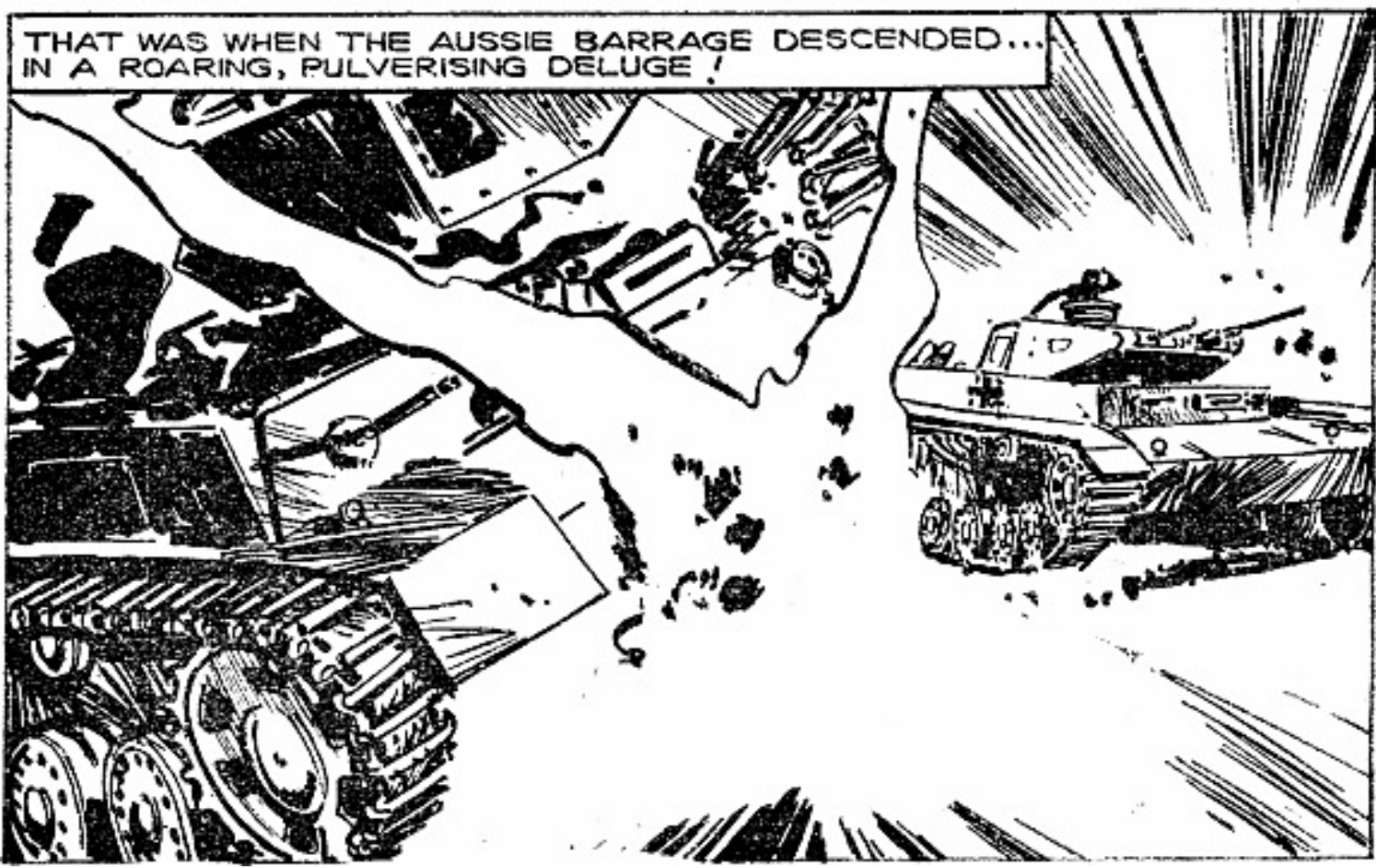
... A CONCENTRATION IS TO BE LAID DOWN BY A BATTERY OF TWENTY-FIVE POUNDERS. I'LL BE DIRECTING THE ARTILLERY'S FIRE ...



WHILE AUSTRALIAN GUNNERS SENT OVER RANGING SHOTS, THE NAZIS STROVE TO CLEAR THE ROAD. AT LENGTH THEY SUCCEEDED ...



THAT WAS WHEN THE AUSSIE BARRAGE DESCENDED... IN A ROARING, PULVERISING DELUGE!



A BARRAGE ZEROED-IN BY CORRECTIONS THAT SAVILLE HAD SENT BACK OVER THE R/T...

IT'S A MASSACRE, SIR! THAT PANZER-GROUP'S HAD ITS CHIPS!

NOT YET, IT HASN'T, BUSTER! A FAIRISH NUMBER OF THE JERRY TANKS ARE SHOVING THEIR WAY THROUGH!

TO THE EAST, DAN AND MURPHY WERE WATCHING IN AWE...

GOOD GRIEF! A JERRY SHELL'S HIT THE CRUSADER'S TURRET!

BUT NOT HEAD-ON! IT'S GLANCED OFF! LUMME! WHO'D BE A TANKMAN, THOUGH!

TWO FIGURES CRAWLED FROM THE BRITISH IRONCLAD AND CAME STUMBLING UP THE ROAD... BUSTER FLEMING AND "DEAD-SHOT" DUGGAN...



AND GUY SAVILLE DID JUST THAT! WITH NAZI TANKS DRAWING NEAR, HE ROUNDED OFF HIS FIRE-DIRECTIONS WITH THE CO-ORDINATES OF THE CRUSADER'S EXACT POSITION!



FOR MINUTES ON END, A FEARFUL HOLOCAUST RAGED.
IN THE MIDST OF IT THE STACKED MINES WENT UP!



AT LAST THE BOMBARDMENT CEASED. ACRID FUMES SWIRLED UPWARD,
LIKE THE FOLDS OF SOME HELLISH CURTAIN -- RISING ON A TABLEAU OF
DEATH AND DESTRUCTION...

ROMMEL WON'T BE SLINGING
NO RIGHT HOOK AT THE EIGHTH
ARMY NOW... THANKS TO THE
BEST OFFICER YOU AND
I EVER KNEW, BUSTER...



IT WAS CORPORAL DAN SHAW WHO MOVED FIRST. THE OTHERS LOOKED ON IN AMAZEMENT AS HE RACED TOWARDS THE BURNING TANK...

HEY! WHAT THE

THE LIEUTENANT MIGHT BE ALIVE. I'VE GOT TO GET HIM OUT OF THERE...



THE FLAMES WERE LICKING THEIR WAY ROUND THE TURRET OF THE CRUSADER AS DAN RAN UP. THROUGH THEM, HE COULD SEE THE LIMP FIGURE OF GUY SAVILLE...

HANG ON, SIR! SOON HAVE YOU OUT...

TH--THANKS... CORPORAL...



DAN PLUNGED THROUGH THE FLAMES, THEIR HUNGRY TONGUES REACHING OUT AS IF TO DEVOUR HIM...



GENTLY, THE CORPORAL LAID GUY SAVILLE ON THE SAND. THE OTHER MEN RACED UP TO THEM.

WELL DONE, CORP! IS HE ALL RIGHT?

HE'LL BE OKAY -- WON'T YOU, SIR?

SURE, THANKS TO YOU, CORPORAL...



AS THEY CLUSTERED ROUND THE LIEUTENANT, AN EAGER SHOUT SPUN THEM ROUND...IT WAS JESMOND! IN THE EXCITEMENT THEY HAD FORGOTTEN THEIR WOUNDED COMRADE...

HEY, YOU LOT! FINE LOT OF MATES YOU ARE! HOW ABOUT COMING UP HERE TO GET ME?

LUMME! I FORGOT ALL ABOUT JESMOND!

ALL RIGHT, CORP, WE'LL GO -- WON'T WE, MURPHY?

SURE! COME ON...



AS THE TWO MEN CLIMBED TO WHERE THEY HAD LEFT JESMOND, GUY SAVILLE SPOKE QUIETLY TO CORPORAL DAN SHAW...

WELL, CORPORAL, WE DID IT, EH?

YOU MEAN **YOU** DID IT, SIR! MAKES YOU THINK, DOESN'T IT? HERE WE'VE BEEN MORE OR LESS FIGHTING EACH OTHER WHEN EVERYBODY ELSE IS FIGHTING THE JERRIES... DAFT, I CALL IT...



I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT, CORPORAL... YES. I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT.

SOON THE MEN WERE READY TO GO ON THEIR WAY. MURPHY AND DUGGAN CARRIED THE WOUNDED JESMOND AND CORPORAL DAN SHAW HELPED THE LIMPING LIEUTENANT...



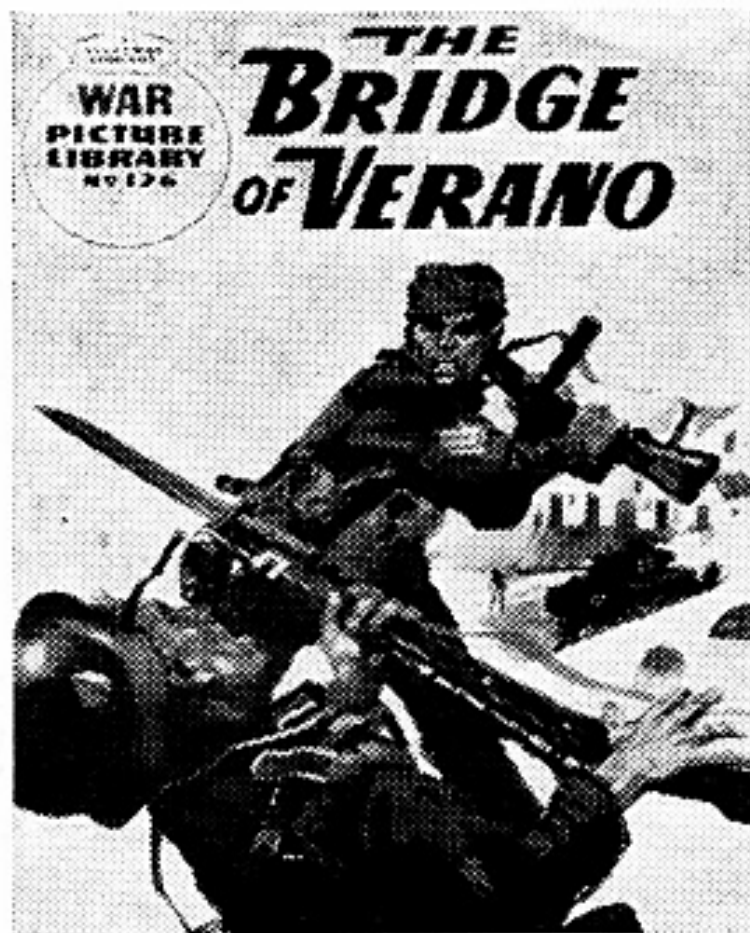
AS THEY SET OFF TOWARDS THEIR OWN LINES AND THE RESCUE TEAM THAT WAS RACING TO MEET THEM, THE SAME THOUGHT WAS IN ALL THEIR MINDS. IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE THEY HAD SETTLED THEIR DIFFERENCES AND NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THEY WERE REALLY UNITED IN FIGHTING THEIR COMMON ENEMY...

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